

behind closed doors, with open hearts

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by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

Sometimes they just happen to meet before the world meetings with a certain kind of intimacy as their company.

Notes

-glances nervously around- It has been an eternity since I last wrote anything for Hetalia, but here we are.

This is carefully dedicated to my most precious princess, who never ceases to make me smile like a fool. Not your choice of pairing, I know, but I am weak to my own fancies.

Copious amount of French that may or may not be correct and whose translations are not all that important, so I did not add them to the notes.

I am an utter sap, as you will learn.

Paris, March.

"*Mon cher.*" England would have recognized that voice anywhere at any given time, and so he gave himself a moment to gather his patience before turning around, hand still clutching at the straps of his luggage.

"France," he acknowledged, but raised a curious brow at the other. "Here meeting with one of the others?"

"Yes, well, I dropped by to have lunch with North Italy, and heard that you had arrived, so here I am~!" France winked, and the strands of hair that weren't tied up swayed, caressing France's cheeks. England never *stared*, but he did like it whenever France tied his hair up, either with ribbons or simple bands he had started to use somewhere along the decades.

God, he couldn't even deny it from himself anymore. He couldn't even blame jet lag, what with the mere one-hour difference between London and Paris. England's lips twitched both at his own thoughts and France's response.

"You came to interfere with my preparations for my speech tomorrow, didn't you?" he asked, brows knitting together as he eyed France in dismay. "Please, just once, don't."

"*Non, non*, whatever makes you think so?" France's expression was innocent enough to confirm his guilt, and so England turned back around and continued his trek towards his assigned room. Tired, from both the train trip and France, he just wanted the rest of the day to himself. Perhaps a short nap wouldn't hurt before checking if the French had got better with tea since his last visit.

"Your face, you twat," England said when France followed him, hands dangerously free from any items. "It screams of mischief, and I do not care for that now."

France tutted, and one of his hands reached for England's shoulder.

"Careful now," England said, a little more bitterly than he had intended. "Wouldn't want anyone to think that we get on, would we?"

France's hand did land on his shoulder, long fingers squeezing at it with something an innocent onlooker would assume to be affection and friendliness. England couldn't quite decide whether it was either of those. There was no real need to try to decipher those things anymore, so he let it go.

"Oh, but we do get on marvelously, *mon ami*," France laughed into his ear, his French accent tickling England's mind like an echo. "It has been a while since I last saw you; let me accompany you for a while, *Angleterre*."

And because apparently England would never learn to simply shrug off France's existence, he nodded in consent and ignored the smile that was splayed on France's lie-spouting lips.

England hung his tweed coat on the rack after he had let France to enter first into the hotel room, cursing himself under his breath. He would not get anything done with France around, that was for sure.

"Ah, my people truly do have great taste in décor," France hummed as England took off his shoes. "Even you shouldn't have any complaints, *mon cher*, it's just fantastic—"

England contemplated on whether throwing his briefcase at France's head would shut him up or not, but reached the conclusion that it would not. England sighed and tuned out the rest of France's self-satisfied gushing, and began to unpack his other luggage. There was not much save for daily necessities and change of clothes as well as a few novels to enjoy when... *if* he got any free time from others.

"—*Dieu*, you're not even listening to me anymore, are you?" France's indignant voice cut off Arthur's train of thought just as he was about to settle in on the couch in the center of the room. Francis – no, *France* – had been checking out the admittedly spacy room as England had unpacked, and was now starting to pay attention to England's uncharacteristic silence.

"No, I was not," England admitted as he lay down, fingers meeting the often-shuffled pages of the novel. There were only a few things nicer than the feeling of book between his hands. "I was hoping you might take the hint, as uncharacteristic as that is for you, frog."

"You are quite rude, are you not?" France sniffed, faking hurt as he took the chair across the sofa. "In such a *romantique* setting too."

England bit back the angry comment that burned on his tongue, just barely managing to keep his eyes on the pages in front of him.

Well. Almost.

"Shouldn't you be seeking for your romance of the day, then?" England's voice was flat, though there was the constant undertone of irritation that seemed especially prominent around France.

"Who says I'm not already doing that, *cher*?" France's face suddenly filled England's field of vision, fingers snatching the novel away from England's slackened grasp. His words were teasing and held a teasing tone, but France's smile was gentle and eyes soft like the waters of Finnish lakes England had not often seen.

It was hard to play indifference when Francis – bloody hell, it's *France* – looked at him like that, like he would never get tired of watching England.

It was a look France – *Francis*? who knew anymore – had mastered a long time ago, and before England wouldn't have given in to it. He might have shoved France's face away. He would definitely have complained until the Frenchman got the hint.

"That is hardly charming," England told him point blank, lying through his teeth because that was what he did best.

"That's because you do not know what charm is, *Angleterre*." The French equivalent of his name made England shiver; the purring of those r sounds was simply criminal. France's soft eyes kept looking at him, lips still wearing an infuriating smile.

"But," England shushed France by placing a finger on his lips, sighing in exasperation, "you may consider me charmed, France."

France's smile widened, eyes crinkling at the corners, and in the next moment he had swooped in to press a light, lingering kiss on England's mouth.

England hated it when France did that; it made him feel *loved*.

It was the most dangerous position to find oneself in, and one that England had never tried to find himself in again.

And yet, England tilted his chin up a bit to change the angle of the kiss, his own eyes closed as France's fingers swept his cheek.

The meeting went as well as England had expected: there were several arguments between him and France, some of which evolved into choking the other by the tie until Germany had someone separate them despite France being the host of the meeting.

Well, it was to be expected, England thought hours later in his hotel room. France knew how fond he was of asphyxiation.

Two days more of Paris and the smell of early spring.

Madrid, May.

England knew several better situations to be stuck in than sitting at one of Spain's many beaches listening to the nation himself conjure up love songs on the spot. He also knew several better spots to sit on than beside the self-proclaimed Country of *l'Amour*, as well, but he had been there first and it was sheer stubbornness that kept him rooted beside France.

That, and the weariness that had clung to his bones ever since the start of the year. Under the Spanish skies, it only got stronger, like his urge to flee when Spain shot a sheepish grin at France. Ugh. England ignored France's brightening expression that he watched from the corner of his eye.

Well. Tried to.

Pretty much everyone was there, only a couple of the more asocial countries had remained at the hotel. (Norway, along with Denmark because God forbid if they should be apart. It was irritating.) Spain sang as he strummed his guitar, old and worn from the use, and quite a few were smiling, regardless of whether they understood the Spanish lyrics or not.

France understood them, and England only knew this because France murmured translations into his ear, half-French and half-English, his breath tickling so much more than just

England's ear.

England was not fond of love songs, which was absurd considering his passion for romance novels and movies, when written and directed well. Maybe it was because he had heard France sing one too many of them along the way through the centuries of their complicated relationship. Not always to him, of course.

France's voice was soft as it murmured translations to England, lips brushing against the lobe of England's ear every now and then. England shivered despite the heat; a single shudder went through his slouched back, but it shook his insides more.

No one was paying any attention to them. If they had, perhaps they would have been surprised to see France so close to him, arms linked and faces close enough to feel each other's warmth. Spain seemed to notice, at some point, as England saw him give a fairly obvious wink at France and himself.

The scowl that marred England's face didn't leave him until he was alone in his air-conditioned hotel room.

The world meeting was pure hell: the conference room lacked air conditioning, and the day was even hotter than the previous one. Spain even remarked, "Wow, it's warm for May." England, among others, had wanted to smack the Spaniard. America didn't seem bothered at all by the temperature, which annoyed England to no end.

France and he made no effort to push forth an argument. Or rather, England didn't; the frog at least tried with his "I disagree with America and England simply because" attitude. America had protested at that; England had remained quiet, fingers clutching at his teacup. *That* had earned him a concerned glance from France, who was thrown off by England's silence on the matter.

In the end, it turned out to be a mild case of a heatstroke. America had a good laugh about it once England had woken up from his brief stint of unconsciousness. England managed to pinch him and scold him, and America seemed placated by that whereas France kept giving England sidelong looks once England was back at the conference table.

Are you sure you're alright, France's eyes wondered.

I'm fine, England's half-hearted glare responded before he refocused his attention on more important matters, such as Greece's crisis that had still no end in sight.

Cairo, July.

If Spain had been awful in May, then Egypt in July was the absolute worst. Africa in general. England hadn't got a clue how he had survived there so long during the period of imperialism. Perhaps it was because back then he still felt capable of everything and anything, whereas now it was hard enough to wake up to the chilly and foggy mornings that, more or less, mirrored his general mood.

England straightened his back as he got through the customs, pain of discomfort shooting up and making him cringe again. Ugh, the ages were starting to catch up with him, weren't they?

Egypt was there to greet him, as he was one of the last arrivals to his country. That, and they did have a few things to discuss outside from the world meeting that was starting up in mere hours. As blank-faced as always, he gave England a folding fan.

"China started mass-producing them the moment he got here," Egypt offered as an explanation when all England did was stared at the item in confusion. "There's no working air-conditioning in the conference room, unfortunately. Broke down last month."

"Oh."

As he stepped into the government-issued car with Egypt, England could only hope the incident from May wouldn't repeat itself.

"I'll see you later," England said to Egypt, who nodded and murmured a goodbye just as England managed to drag himself into the hotel room.

"Bonjour, Angleterre."

...That he was sharing with France. It was an arrangement England had been aware of, but the knowledge didn't lessen the vague feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. They had only met once between the meeting in Spain and this moment.

"France," he said stiffly, his throat parched and constricting around the name. "You look absolutely trashed. Your food industry on a strike or something?"

"Non, non," France smiled, and even though his hair clung to his sweaty face, he still managed to look radiant. "It is the heat. I'm afraid I, too, don't take well to it."

Yet England could still recall those long days racing against each other in the days of their morality-lacking glory, and in those memories France had never been anything but breathtaking. England had hated him for it. He had resented France for many things. He still did – but it was a personal reason, one that had festered in the past decades.

I don't want to marry you for that reason, England's own words echoed in his ears, and he flinched despite himself, quickly turning away before France could see the shift on his expression.

"Liar," England said, yawning as he took off his suit jacket and the tie that felt more like a rope around his neck. "You're too vain to succumb to the heat."

"And you're too brutish to do anything to change your unstylish appearance," France retorted, but most of the intended bite was sucked out by the heat. But then his voice took on a much more interested tone. *"Mon Dieu,* are you stripping?"

"I just can't help myself around you, Francis," England scoffed, and it was definitely the heat that made him forget how Francis had always had a rather selective hearing when it came to

sarcasm.

France. He meant France.

"So, you *are* surrendering to my charms?" France's voice a delightful purr, one that England imagined he would hear from a contented cat. "*Cher*, you are only a thousand years late."

"As if," England huffed, scowling as his fingers hesitated on the buttons of the white dress shirt. *Who would want to be a French territory?!* he recalled another string of his own words, and smiled despite the irritation associated with that particular memory.

"You need help with that?" France's voice was closer than anticipated, even though the footsteps had tipped France's approach off. Of course, England should not have expected otherwise: France was always eager to help others out of their clothes. Right now, too, France's fingers danced over the buttons of England's shirt, not yet moving to open them.

France was a bit like a vampire – he needed to be invited in for him to do anything more than casual affection.

A ghost of a smile spread over England's lips just as France's hovered over his neck, breathing the hot and humid air against the flushed skin.

"*Angleterre*," France's voice was muffled by the lack of distance between his mouth and England's neck. England's heart skipped a beat; the flash of a memory from the 50's sprung to life again. "*Tu me permets...?*"

England inhaled, an old desire flickering to life. "Yes, yes. Go ahead, France."

They always, always wound up there.

France's lips moved against his neck languidly, caressing the tight skin while the hands worked on England's shirt.

Sitting down first might have been a better idea, England distantly thought as France's hands moved beneath the shirt, up his abdomen. The kisses at his neck were wet with affection, warm with what France was best known for. Love without a home address to send it to.

England hummed – *le bien qui fait mal*, indeed – as France's fingers trailed up, rubbing at the sweaty skin with their tips. The kisses moved from England's neck to his earlobes, accompanied by terribly tender nipping.

Buttons were open, by now, and France pulled back to slide the article of clothing down from England's shoulders and arms. England sighed in content as France's hands returned to cradle his chest, fingers flicking far away from the most obvious places.

"You are so tense," France murmured as he carefully backpedaled both of them towards the simple couch. "Allow me to help."

"I don't need your *help*," England snorted, but he didn't put up a fight when France pushed him face down on the couch. It was difficult to muster up energy to ward off France's (very

much wanted) approaches; maybe it was because England could still hear the soft French translations of a Spanish love song in his ear.

"Of course not," France snorted, a playful sound that sunk to England's tired heart and made its home there. His hands trailed England's back, pressing palms over the skin with careful consideration. France's frown was audible in his voice when he sighed, "*Mon Dieu*, when was the last time you got a massage? No wonder you're so uptight all the time."

Like I'd go to anyone but you for something like that, England thought. "Just get on with it, we don't have all day."

"*Tu es plus impatient que Amerique*," France mused, half-hearted amusement tangled in his words.

"English, France, *English*," England grumbled. He ignored exactly two facts: one, he understood France's French perfectly, and two, he could produce quite a few grammatically correct French sentences himself.

Well, there was also a third fact to ignore.

The fact that France knew both of these previous points.

The meeting was not as bad as it could have been. England didn't faint, for one. France was still an arse, but fighting with him in the heavy summer heat was unwise. England still managed a good shove somewhere in the middle, receiving a string of French curses in response as well as a pinch to his cheek.

America was still as dim as ever, and England continued to feel that irritating stab of fondness inside him when America's eyes would light up and mouth curl into a grin. Nothing new on that area.

America should, however, stop coming up to England from behind when the other is clearly typing a message on his phone. Or at least give a verbal warning *before* lunging to wrap an arm around England's slouched self.

"Hey, who are ya texting to?" On these occasions, America sounded petulantly jealous like only little brothers managed to, and that was why England instinctively slammed the butt of the phone on America's head.

"Ow! England, what the hell?!"

"You startled me, you stupid American!"

Maybe he was just not meant to send France anything resembling honesty.

J'essaie vraiment de faire en sorte que tu ne me manques pas trop tu sais?

Once again, England deleted the message from his drafts before America could get a look at the screen.

(I really am trying not to miss you so much, you know?)

Helsinki, September.

The meeting was not for another two days, which meant that England had a lot of time to ignore the magnificent colours of Finland's autumn and reacquaint himself with the bars of central Helsinki. France wasn't there yet – not that *that* mattered, even though France was his usual drinking partner and confidant to his drunken rants.

Finland joined him this time, because he too hadn't spent much time in bars recently.

Finland ordered the drinks for them, because there was just no way the Finnish bartenders could understand England's rapidly thickening Cockney accent once they got it going.

"Vodka?" England peered at the contents of Finland's glass, raising one of his infamous eyebrows. "That bad?"

Finland laughed, eyes crinkling at the corners. "I'm quite fond of it, these days."

"I see." England glanced at the rum in his own glass. He hadn't had any in what felt like ages, when it probably was just a few months between the last attempt at holding his liquor and now. Politics had kept him busy, because people just could not manage a country on their own.

It was much more tiring than what it used to be, England thought – but he had always been preferential to absolute monarchy, and sometimes he found his thoughts lingering on those times. It was selfish, of course, because what had been England's golden times hadn't necessarily been that for his people.

England remembered France from those times, *le Roi-Soleil* and Versailles, bathed in luxury and arrogance of royalty. The centuries had done very little to deteriorate France's outward beauty. It was the inside that had changed, time and time again.

"*Englanti?*" Finland's blueberry eyes blinked at him, and the harsh consonants of the Finnish version of his name startled England. "You zoned out. Is something on your mind?"

England tried not to make a face, but Finland seemed to notice his reluctance regardless. "Oh, you don't need to say anything. It's really uncomfortable when someone tries to pry answers that you don't particularly want to share with the said person."

There was a dull edge in Finland's voice that made England take a cautious sip from his drink. "Russia?"

"Russia," Finland nodded, a somewhat sheepish expression on his face. "He's been rather passive-aggressive about my relations with NATO."

England winced in sympathy. "It's not easy neighboring one of the biggest nations in the world, is it?"

"It isn't," Finland grumbled, gulping down half a glass of the vodka drink in one go. "But he's—he's not *bad*, you know? I wished it was easier to get along with him what with our similar climates and interests and all."

England wondered if anyone had ever said that about him. He had been complained a lot about in the past, after all, for very similar reasons.

"But anyways," Finland cleared his throat, his smile fading. "The EU sucks."

"Now *that*," England managed a genuine laugh, "is a sentiment I share."

"*Skål*," Finland grinned as they clinked their glasses together.

Somehow, it ended up being France that dragged England out from that gloomy and beautifully Finnish bar, one arm supporting England from his waist while he dragged them through a gorgeous park and towards their hotel. England only realized it halfway through the trip; so far, he had kept calling France Finland before actually noticing the curly blond hair that France had once again tied up.

"...Fra... nce?"

"Oh, *finally*," France snorted, and tightened his hold over England. There was something so terribly familiar in it that it made England's heart ache more than usual. "I was starting to wonder if I was going to have to listen to you address me as *Finlande* all night."

"What're you doing here," England hiccuped, leaning dangerously closer to France's softness. "Wasn't your flight supposed to come in tomorrow?"

"How could I stay away from you, *mon amour*?" France laughed, lips meeting the other's cheek in a hurry. "I obviously changed my plans."

Hope was the worst thing; even though England should know better after all these centuries, he could not help but succumb to its anxious hold.

The thing was, England was a horrible drunk: emotions ran high, tears were often shed, and the fun died way too fast.

It was a recipe for disaster in the wrong company, and both France and America were definitely in the category of *wrong* as they were both a source of distress for England.

Prussia and Denmark were tolerable to drink with once England first got past how insufferable both of them were. Finland was a great company to complain about the European Union with. France was the one England drank with the most, though.

So France dragging England back to his room or house was not a new scene in the least: the rustling of clothes as France dug out England's keycard to his room, the adjusting of hand on England's waist, England's own ragged breaths, and then the eventual steps into the room.

"Bathroom?" France asked, his accent much more charming to England's ears than usual. England shook his head, and wrapped his arms around the slim waist, breathed in France's spring-like scent.

"*Angleterre*," France scolded, expression wary as his eyes inspected the look on England's face. They always, always reached this point, no matter how long it took them. "We should not."

"France," England pouted. Surely that was an effective tactic, since France used it all the time and failed only about... sixty percent of the time. Huh. "Must I say it out loud?"

"Back to Queen's English?" France raised a brow at the change in accent. "*Cher*, try as you may to prove me otherwise, you are as drunk as Alfred was on last Christmas from the eggnog."

"*Francis*," England's lips thinned, "I'm very sober. The evening air cleared my head."

"Try to walk in a straight line, then." France's eyes sparkled with the faintest hint of sadistic amusement as he pushed England's hands off of him and took a few steps back himself to watch England's attempt. When England only blinked at him, green eyes hazy and not completely understanding the situation, France sighed again. "*Cher*, walk to the sofa. On your right."

England really would have rather been snogging France by then, and his sour and petulant downcurl of a lip said as much, but he did as he was told.

And tripped over the rug on the floor.

"This means nothing, you git!" England screeched over France's gleeful laughter.

The next morning, England found himself with several regrets, one of them not being able to say no to the Finn's offer for traditional Finnish liquor. The biggest one, well...

How many times had he gone through that particular route with France? Getting drunk, getting home, then attempt to drunkenly seduce the other if the other wasn't drunk himself. When France was sober, the results were the same every time: gentle rejection before helping England to empty his stomach before sleeping. When they were both drunk, well, the results varied a bit.

Which was why England had once awoken with a miniature French flag shoved up his rear.

France had never let that incident go, but the other ones – when England was at his loneliest and saddest and neediest – he never mentioned, never brought them up in a way that would have embarrassed England. And if France was aware of the full extent of England's feelings, well, the prick never showed any signs of it.

England loved his alcohol – to the point where it was a problem, but everyone was allowed to have a vice or two or fifteen like England – but they came with the price of waking up to a

dry throat and a sense of disgust that was hard to locate at first as well as the dim knowledge that he had fucked up again.

That was how he woke up that day too. At the crack of a dawn.

He remembered enough to know he had started crying at France at some point during the careful babying of the island nation. That had happened so many times that it had stopped being embarrassing, but the content of his sobbing was probably—

England turned his head, trying to look for another body beside him. France would usually stay with him, regardless of the things he had said.

There was nothing but the sterile white pillow England had instinctively clung onto in his sleep. It smelled like France's cologne.

England would not sniff at it like a fool fallen in love.

He would also not squeeze out a few tears to mourn for his inability to formulate the truth with sober mouth and mind. The game of pretense was easier then, however: *no, I do not care for you, this is just to pass the time*, and all those other befuddling excuses that were shaky at best.

He would, however, admit to thinking about how he and France keep dancing around each other, dodging the core of whatever it was that their present relationship was made of. It was impossible to break away from it, and England was—England was tired of all the smiles with double meanings that led to nothing more than lonely mornings and a sheltered heart.

But he had lost his chance of being honest a long time ago.

England smothered his face with the pillow, sighing deeply and inadvertently breathing in the remnants of France's scent.

At least the meeting was not on that day.

Dodging France and everyone else had been easy on that day, but the following one with the world meeting was another deal entirely. Which was why England stood behind the double doors with a severe wince twisting his lips. He wasn't sure if he wanted to see the kicked-puppy looks France would try to hide behind the papers, like he always would when they met the first time after England's drinking trips.

England was never sure what it was he said that made France sulk like that. Insults *irritated* France instead of saddening him, so England's rich vocabulary was not the reason.

Sighing to himself, England stared at the oaken doors, hand hovering over the handle when he was pounced on from behind. Which led to England stumbling through the doors with a highly inappropriate screech and a string of *what the FUCK, France!*

The occupants of the conference room gave them a long stare, and Germany's words "*Mein Gott, are they at it already*" were lost under England's loud flailing and cursing while France

laughed and clung to England's waist.

"*Mon petit lapin*," France managed to whisper to him just as Hungary came, with visible reluctance, to separate them. "You don't need alcohol to be wanted; you are plenty wanted as you are now."

As if to ease the awkwardness of his statement, France added with a wink, "*Sourcils*."

It was only Hungary's strong grasp on England's arm that kept him from leaping on France and hurling another round of insults at his disgustingly French face.

"Trust me, I know how you feel," Hungary said solemnly, nodding her head as she led England to his seat. "Unresolved sexual tension is awful, isn't it?"

"There's *nothing* like that—"

Moscow, November.

"It's fucking cold in here."

"Thank you for your enlightening input on Russia's lovely weather, Arthur."

England glowered at France (Francis) from beneath the multitude of blankets, and France smiled, eyes sparkling with teasing amusement as England wrapped himself up in the nest.

"*Mon cher*, you don't even have central heating in your house, yet you call this cold?" France tutted. "Russia would be hurt if he heard, *non*?"

"I have a fireplace," England muttered as though that was everything he needed.

"I have *you*," England added, an afterthought that France was not really supposed to hear but which he did, regardless of England's wishes.

"Oh, *amour*," France cooed as he settled himself beside England's nest, hands slowly unwrapping it one blanket at a time. "*Tu es précieux*. So cute when you're honest."

England shivered more from France's tone than the draught. Trying not to look at France's face, England inhaled and rolled onto his side when the last blanket was unfolded and France slipped to his side on the bed. England was still sure it had been Russia's plan from the beginning to give them a room with only one double bed.

Ah, good intentions or not, England appreciated it when France's arms wound around him, lips pressing kisses to England's neck.

"I'll keep you real warm, *mon amour*," France promised, one of his hands trailing over to England's hip to massage away the obvious soreness England still felt from the flight to Russia they had, coincidentally, shared. "Maybe a full-body massage this time, *oui*?"

"You make everything sound so indecent," England complained even as he leaned back towards France's warmth, even as he shivered from the tingling breaths fanning at his skin.

"*Mais tu aimes quand je—*"

"Actions speak louder than words," England retorted, face flushing red from something other than cold as he glanced at the Frenchman behind him. The smile on France's face was teasing, eyes narrowing with delight sparkling in the bright hue of blue.

"You're not even rebuking me for the abundance of my lovely language," France commented, the sparkle in his eyes nearly blinding. "You must want me quite badly, no?"

"France, the more you talk, the more turned off I become."

"Let me cherish this moment, Arthur," France murmured, "to be wanted is a wonderful feeling, *oui*? In any way."

England turned himself completely around in France's arms, wanting to have a proper look at France's face. His hands found France's cheeks easily, despite their trembling. *It was the cold.* Green eyes sought out contact with the glimmering blue ones, and when it happened, England lost his breath.

Fuck. How did happiness look so *radiant* on France's face? England's stomach churned. America sometimes described certain feelings as "warm and fuzzy". Was this what the American had meant? England could certainly detect fuzziness blooming somewhere within him at the sight of France's tender smile.

Ugh.

"You're blushing," France noted with a laugh.

"You are, too," England grumbled, running a thumb over the peak of France's cheekbone where most of the faint pinkish colour lingered. France's hair tickled at the back of his hand, glowing gold in the early winter light.

"Mm," France hummed, his hand moving to England's behind. Incurable as always, but England didn't protest when France's fingers curled to squeeze.

"*Embrasse-moi*," England blurted out.

France obliged, laughing against England's lips that had gone stiff from the embarrassment.

"Arthur," France said, fondness overtaking his voice as he murmured between kisses, "do you remember when I first taught you French all those centuries ago?"

England groaned. He would rather forget that particular time of his past.

"*Embrasse-moi* I told you," France whispered, lips caressing England's ear. "You thought I said you were an embarrassment to me, though."

"Francis," England whined, turning his head away. "Must you remind me?"

"It was adorable," France insisted, nuzzling into the curve of England's slender neck. "*Mon petit lapin*. The caterpillar that tried to become a butterfly by mimicking *moi*."

They hadn't talked about the past in a while, save for England's drunken rants, and so England found his throat constricting with emotion.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," England hissed. "You embarrass me."

"Gladly," France winked and leaned in for a kiss, England's hands sliding up to the back of his head to pull him close.

God, this man was insufferable—

The meeting was like a Friday night for England: it all went downhill rather quickly.

America and Russia were the main reasons for that, which had been expected. America had never felt comfortable on Russian soil, and the boy was even more talkative because of it... until Russia kindly suggested that America "let us others give our unbiased commentary, *da?*"

Amidst the chaos that came from the argument between America and Russia, only one remained serene and far away from the fights around the table.

That was Hungary, and it was because she was thinking contentedly to herself about the things she had heard through the paper-thin walls of their hotel.

Love is truly a magnificent thing, she thought as she watched England and France go at it despite being on the opposite ends of the table.

After the first day was finished, she even earned the privilege of catching a glimpse of France pressing an open-mouthed kiss on England's knuckles, head bowed down, and England smiling softly and running fingers through France's blond locks.

Hungary's smile remained radiant for the rest of the day, earning raised brows from Austria and Prussia both.

London, January.

Francis woke up to the sounds of drizzling rain and whistling wind. *Ah*, he mused mournfully, *the weather had been so nice yesterday*. Francis entertained the thought that England's weather had mirrored the nation's mood itself: after all, it had been nice and sunny when Francis had set his foot on the British soil with Arthur waiting for him at the station.

Wouldn't it be nice to think that Arthur's brightened mood had affected his weather? Francis smiled, nuzzling against the said man's neck, and listened to both their breathing as he waited for Arthur to acknowledge him.

Arthur's fingers curled around the hand pressed over his chest. "Francis..."

His voice was rough from sleep, and yet Francis adored the sound of it. Love truly was a powerful thing, he thought not for the first time as he entwined their fingers and kissed Arthur's neck. Soft, loving, wanting. Selfish little kisses like that.

"Shall I," Francis murmured into Arthur's ear, "compare thee to a summer's day?"

"Mmm," Arthur's smile was a warm little thing, and showed up in the undertone of his voice. "Thou hast no class."

"*Arthur*," Francis groaned and smacked Arthur's chest feebly with his free hand. That did very little to stop the silly Englishman from snorting and shaking with laughter, the sound tentative and shy in the first hours of morning. "I was trying to be romantic, you little delinquent!"

"Yes, yes," Arthur sighed and turned his head to gaze at Francis with bleary eyes. "It's your fault for picking that particular sonnet, though. William would have appreciated the humour, if he were here."

"I'm not too well-versed in his works, so *exqusez-moi*," Francis sniffed.

"You used to be, though," Arthur sighed, shifting to get his hand into Francis's hair.

"Remember when you tried to court me in the early 17th century for whatever reason? Just because you wanted to mess with my head."

Francis recalled something as Arthur said it. "Ah, yes. *Angleterre, Angleterre*, wherefore art thou *Angleterre*."

"But really, trying to make me swoon with the 18th sonnet?" Arthur laughed as he kissed Francis's nose. Their hands let go of each other so that Arthur could turn to fully face Francis. The half-lidded eyes shone in the morning light, easily recapturing Francis's attention. "Love, I should be reading that to you."

Francis's heart melted. A puddle, that was what his heart had become when facing the most sheltered side of Arthur.

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" Arthur began, hands cradling Francis's face. "Thou art more lovely and more temperate..."

"Oh, you stuffy Englishman," Francis sighed and leaned over for mouth-to-mouth greeting, hands finding Arthur's sides again to pull him closer.

There was no hurry – Francis always came a couple days before the actual world meeting took its place.

Plenty of time to steal Arthur away from work for a while, plenty of time to catch a glimpse of what Arthur could never truly hide from him.

Arthur's lips were warm and compliant from sleep, though his breath did stink. Francis wrinkled his nose a little, but pressed on regardless when he felt Arthur's hands caress the side and the back of his head. Arthur hummed lightly in return, obviously pleased when the kiss lingered and Francis's teeth nibbled at his lips playfully.

Both their hands roamed, as though they didn't know each other's bodies as well as their own. There was no hurry, unlike during some of their previous times. The most urgent thing on their minds was perhaps who would prepare the breakfast, but even that thought dimmed as they got lost in each other on that chilly January morning.

(Later, Francis would wake up again to the smell of burnt scones, much to his own horror.)

"You know," France said slowly as he stared at the conference table contemplatively, "I have always wanted to do it on one of these, *cher*."

England, who had been pacing around, nearly choked on his tongue. "*France!*"

"What?" France pouted as he caught sight of England's disapproving face. "Come on now, we both know you're not above that. Do I need to remind you—"

"Be quiet, France."

"—München -94, I think? Or was it before? You were quite ready to do it back then, although you seemed to still be a little tipsy..."

"France."

"You're just being shy because this is your own country, *non*? But rest assured, it will be very pleasurable and—"

England tugged France close by the tie. "I will choke you with this, if I must."

France tutted. "I see you're still fond of asphyxiation, Arthur."

"Want to test me?" England frowned at him.

"If it gets you off," France chirped, placing the tips of his fingers to England's temples, and flashed his most charming smile at his love. "I live to love, after all."

"You're awful," England complained, but leaned forward to allow a brief contact between their lips. What he really meant was something like *what would I do without you*, and France knew it.

"You, as well," he laughed, stealing another kiss from his dear.

The meeting went like normal: France and England fought, America laughed and played silly, and everyone else just rolled with it.

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